

YOUNG WOMEN CHOOSING ACTION



FACILITATOR TRAINING GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Young Women Choosing Action is a culturally responsive, trauma-informed leadership program intentionally designed to address the unique challenges and opportunities of low-income young women and young women of color, ages 13-19. *Young Women Choosing Action* will enable young women to practice skills and behaviors that can lead to greater clarity and personal responsibility, as well as greater community engagement.

The Facilitator Training Guide is designed to enhance what is already provided in the curriculum. It contains a powerful set of tools and foundational information that have proven to be crucial to the effective implementation of this program for the greatest benefit of the young women involved.

The importance of a well-prepared, highly trained, approachable facilitator cannot be understated when it comes to the success of youth programs. The Facilitator Training Guide supports the *Young Women Choosing Action* curriculum by providing clear instructions on how to initiate, plan, and facilitate the program for maximum effectiveness. Specifically, this guide provides strategies for incorporating choice, using social media to support the curriculum, and planning a social action project.

Young Women Choosing Action unifies several practices which have been shown to help at-risk youth gain skills and dispositions that support personal growth and achievement into one comprehensive curriculum. Program facilitators should be comfortable engaging with the core components of the program and have a strong understanding of the

terminology and best practices involved in delivering each of the following program elements:

- **Choice Theory**
- **Cultural Responsiveness**
- **Social Media**
- **Positive Youth Development (PYD)**
- **Trauma-Informed Care and Practice**
- **Adolescent Development**
- **Mindfulness and Self-Regulation**
- **Intersectional Social Justice Strategies**

The Facilitator Training Guide will provide a basis of information for each of these elements, as well as suggested resources for further exploration of each topic. *Young Women Choosing Action* speaks to the power of making knowledgeable, informed choices. This guide intends to lay the foundation for such empowerment by providing facilitators with the information they need to effectively deliver a program tailored to their participants' needs.

CHOICE THEORY

Young women who have implicitly or explicitly been denied choice and power in various aspects of their lives may struggle with making beneficial decisions for themselves. In general, healthy decision making can be tricky for adolescents because the frontal lobes of the brain (reasoning center) are not fully developed and the amygdala (emotional and reactive area of the brain) tends to be in overdrive. Often, an adolescent's desire to be decisive conflicts with her developmentally appropriate desire for freedom. Add to the equation gender, cultural, peer, and circumstantial expectations around choice, and it is no wonder that young women might struggle with making the best behavioral and emotional choices for themselves.

To address the adolescent's complicated relationship with decision making, *Young Women Choosing Action* incorporates the concept of choice into nearly every aspect of the program. Each session is designed to integrate elements of Choice Theory, which states that we are all driven by genetics to satisfy five basic needs—power, love and belonging, freedom, fun, and survival—and that we choose our behavior to meet these needs. This curriculum provides young women with strategies for making informed choices within the context of their lives.

One of the core principles of Choice Theory is that, whether we are aware of it or not, we are always behaving to meet these needs:

- **Power:** achievement, feeling worthwhile, feeling successful.
- **Love & Belonging:** feeling included in groups, feeling honored and appreciated by family, friends, and loved ones.
- **Freedom:** a sense of autonomy or independence, feeling free to express oneself.
- **Fun:** experiencing pleasure and enjoyment.

- **Survival:** having access to water, food, shelter, and healthy options.

While we are always behaving (consciously or unconsciously) to meet these needs, we do not necessarily always choose the most effective behaviors for meeting them. Therefore, our choices may prohibit us from attaining that for which we strive. Societal factors, such as systemic racism, gender inequality, and economic inequality, often work to suppress young women's full expressions of choice. The curriculum's social action leadership project offers young women an opportunity to explore and address the connection between choice and injustice. Young women will practice making personal choices that support their own needs even as they strive to expand access for choice and power through their social action work.

By incorporating the five basic needs of Choice Theory into each module, the *Young Women Choosing Action* curriculum lays the groundwork for PYD, and opportunities for choice, self-direction, and success. Each module's "I Choose" affirmation promotes the notion of intent and encourages young women to explore making choices which support one or more of the five basic needs.

STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING CHOICE THEORY

- Talk to participants about the idea of Choice Theory and how we all strive to meet basic needs. Encourage them to think about their behaviors in terms of choices.
- Use the contract-building process to discuss and reinforce how Choice Theory is incorporated into the program.
- Reinforce that typically, when we are not triggered, we can choose how we behave, and we can work to choose behaviors that meet our needs while also supporting our goals. Use the brain science lessons in *Young Women Choosing Action* curriculum to support this notion.
- Be clear that while we cannot always choose our circumstances, we can often choose our responses to them.
- Should conflict arise, use the language of Choice Theory to negotiate the situation. Ask what a participant might be needing in that moment and how she might choose behaviors to effectively meet that need. For instance, if someone erupts because she does not think the group members are listening to her ideas, you may recognize this as a need for power and frame the question, “What behaviors could you choose to effectively get the group to hear your ideas?”
- Use PYD strategies and trauma-informed approaches to support an atmosphere in which the five basic needs are met.
- Whenever you find you have extra time in the program, see this as an opportunity to play. Utilize Cultivating Community Practices (curriculum) to select a game which encourages Fun as well as Love & Belonging.
- Discuss how mindfulness strategies help support effective decision making.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

- What is Choice Theory? — <http://www.funderstanding.com/educators/choice-theory/>



CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Because every group of participants is unique, facilitators will determine and choose pertinent cultural, experiential, and developmental factors for the group

Findings presented in the *Journal of Adolescent Research*² speak to the benefits of designing culturally responsive, out-of-school activities for adolescents. Part of an adolescent's burgeoning sense of identity involves exploring and resolving her cultural identity. Culturally responsive programs can help to support this developmental milestone, and they incorporate many of the same qualities as do Choice Theory, PYD, and trauma-informed practice (e.g., supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, appropriate structure and safe spaces, opportunities for skill building, support for efficacy, and integration of family and community efforts).

Strategies for Cultivating Cultural Responsiveness:³

- **Assess your own behavior.** Understand how your attitudes and behaviors have been shaped by your own culture and experience. Investigate any bias you might have about the culture, race, or gender identity of the participants in your group and work to broaden your mindset, if necessary. Model the use of inclusive language and avoid use of discriminatory or stereotyping language. Treat all participants with equal respect and consideration.
 - **Know your participants.** Focus and build on individual strengths. Engage in culturally sensitive interactions with adolescents, such as sharing life experiences and culturally sensitive displays of emotions. Be sensitive to families' cultural values and work with families to bridge any cultural differences.
 - **Encourage all participants to engage.** Encourage participants to express their needs, interests, and opinions. Support participants with respectful feedback
- as they explore their cultural identities and resolve issues concerning culture.
- **Create a culturally safe environment.** Address specific safety concerns of participants who are marginalized, victimized, or have other safety concerns, such as survivors of domestic violence or undocumented participants. Promote constructive, culturally based conflict resolution among adolescents and facilitators. Encourage prosocial norms and behaviors. Promote respect and value of diversity.
 - **Adapt, as necessary.** Be flexible and adapt structural aspects of the program to align with participants' cultural backgrounds, while maintaining the overall integrity and intent of the program. Co-construct activity decisions between participants and facilitators, placing participant voice at the center. In other words, offer choice when appropriate. Defer to participants' needs and wishes, unless doing so leads to an improper or unworkable decision. In that case, provide suggestions for how to create a more feasible solution.
 - **Mentor participants.** Be a guide to participants as they navigate their multicultural society and the daily challenges that occur within and outside the program.
 - **Foster positive interactions.** Encourage shared ownership among adolescents from diverse cultural groups.
 - **Cultivate a shared identity.** Foster a kinship among members of *Young Women Choosing Action* while honoring participants' unique identities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

- Designing Culturally Responsive Organized After-School Activities – https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306524879_Designing_Culturally_Responsive_Organized_After-School_Activities

²Simpkins, et al. 2016.

³Ibid.

INCORPORATING SOCIAL MEDIA

According to Common Sense Media, American teens use an average of nine hours of screen media per day for entertainment. This does not include screen time used for school or homework. Sixty-five percent of teens from lower-income households own smartphones or tablets. Young people from lower-income homes and Black and Hispanic children spend far more time with media—especially screen media—than white children and children from higher- and middle-income homes. Lower-income teens average more than eight (8) hours a day with screen media compared with five (5) hours among higher-income teens. Similarly, Black teens average eight (8) hours a day with screen media, compared with six (6) hours among Hispanics and six (6) hours among whites.

While “screen media” use can include many types of activities—Skyping, reading, playing games, watching educational videos—we know that teens are primarily watching TV and videos, playing games, and using social media. These are not necessarily negative activities, but the sheer amount of time devoted to non-educational screen use and the differences among groups are noteworthy and deserve much deeper examination and discussion.

Young Women Choosing Action offers opportunities to engage with young women on and around their media use, particularly social media. Social media use is especially prevalent among young women. Social media offers adolescents the ability to engage with the world in an interactive and, at times, proactive manner. Conversely, social media use can be addictive and provide a forum for harassment or other misuse. It is important to engage participants in conversations about how their relationship with media impacts their health, emotional well-being, and relationships. Be sure to encourage healthy decision making and personal responsibility around their media use.



Because young women are drawn to social media, the *Young Women Choosing Action* curriculum encourages incorporating the use of social media to reinforce and support the lessons of each module. By creating a private page or thread on the most preferred social media platform, you can provide links to relevant videos or podcasts; encourage dialogue about mindfulness, goal-setting, and social action. Participants should also be informed that they should be mindful about their posts since no page is 100% private nor secure.

Although it is rare, even among low-income young women, some participants in the program may not have access to social media due to family rules, economics, or other constraints. Consult with the young women as they enroll to determine their access and family expectations around social media. Develop a social media plan that is as inclusive of all participants as possible. It is important that no participant feels left out of the conversations due to lack of social media access.

STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING SOCIAL MEDIA IN *YOUNG WOMEN CHOOSING ACTION*

- Survey participants regarding access to social media and preferred social media platforms, as well as any rules each family might have regarding media use.
- Work with participants to create guidelines for safe and positive use of social media. Be clear that this space is used only to promote the work the young women do in the program. Decide together what content is appropriate to share (i.e., mindfulness activities, yoga selfies, articles relevant to social justice work, etc.) and what content is inappropriate (conspiracy theory sites, violent or pornographic content, etc.).
- Establish relevant hashtags to use when sharing information with each other, such as #ChoosingAction #Ichoose, etc.
- Encourage young women to be mindful in their media use and to prioritize schoolwork and other responsibilities.
- Explain that although using social media can be addictive, using it in the context of this program allows participants an opportunity to practice using it responsibly.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Media Use by Tweens and Teens — <https://www.common sense media.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens#>
- Social Media and the Teenage Brain — https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPW9_yfGts0

RECRUITMENT AND INCENTIVES

When enrolling young women in *Young Women Choosing Action*, consider the following questions:

How do we describe the program?

Young Women Choosing Action is an intersectional, culturally responsive, trauma-informed leadership program. It provides young women with opportunities to develop leadership skills, contribute meaningfully to their community, and cultivate personal well-being.

Who are the intended participants?

The program is appropriate for any young woman; however, the curriculum is designed to meet the unique needs and challenges of low-income young women and young women of color. The recruitment goal of this program is for all cohorts to reflect the racial/ethnic and economic demographics of the service area. All young

people between the ages of 13 and 19 who identify as girls/young women—regardless of gender expression—should be eligible to participate in this program.

How many participants can enroll?

To maximize the benefits and attention to personal growth for each participant, it is recommended that *Young Women Choosing Action* be delivered to cohorts of no fewer than 10 and no more than 16. This allows each participant to engage meaningfully with the leadership project and to receive attentive support from the two co-facilitators.

What if more than sixteen young women wish to enroll?

Enrollment priority should be given to young women who meet the greatest number of criteria outlined in the *Young Women Choosing Action* participant application.

Should more than sixteen young women wish to enroll, program staff may opt to pursue one or both of the following courses of action:

- **Wait List. Keep a running list of eligible applicants.** Invite them to participate in subsequent sessions of *Young Women Choosing Action*.

- **Concurrent sessions.** If staffing and time allow, run more than one session of *Young Women Choosing Action* concurrently.

How do we find and retain eligible participants?

Draw from the recruitment strategies to develop a locally relevant, multitiered recruitment strategy and an ongoing programmatic incentive plan.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

- **Invitation to current constituents.** Consider the programs and enrollment of existing YWCA programs. Invite eligible young women within those programs to participate.
- **School and community referrals.** Provide contacts at local schools, churches, and community agencies with information and application materials for *Young Women Choosing Action* and ask them to refer the program to eligible young women.
- **Advertising.** Distribute and display flyers in relevant community locations. Share information about enrolling in the program with local media outlets that provide public service announcements. Place ads in local print media.
- **Social media.** Advertise on YWCAs' social media pages and website.
- **Community presentations.** Arrange to give a brief talk for local community groups.
- **Word of mouth.** Talk about *Young Women Choosing Action* in all relevant contexts and ask people to spread the word.
- **Peer referrals.** As young women begin to enroll in the program, encourage them to invite friends to apply.



INCENTIVES

- **Access to transportation.** In areas with public transit, this could include purchasing public transportation passes for participants. Rural locations may offer transportation via YWCA's vehicles or vouchers for gas.
- **Enhanced access to YWCA offerings.** Participants or family members could be provided free or reduced cost access to one or more YWCA programs or services.
- **Food.** Providing nutritious and appealing snacks or meals immediately before or during each session of *Young Women Choosing Action* is not only a useful incentive, but it also could lead to participants' sustained energy and attention.
- **Weekly door prizes.** At the end of each module, present a prize to a participant whose name is drawn. Only those in attendance are eligible for the prize. In selecting door prizes, choose items that young women in the session may particularly value.
- **Graduated prizes.** Consider providing every recipient with items relevant to program content at intervals throughout the program. For instance, after the third, sixth, and tenth modules, all participants who have regularly attended receive a stress ball, set of intention cards, or a yoga mat.
- **Certificate of completion.** Make participants aware that, upon completion of the program, they will receive a certificate stating that they have completed a trauma-informed leadership course. They will be able to include their participation in *Young Women Choosing Action* on job and college applications.
- **Stipend internship opportunities.** All young women who complete the *Young Women Choosing Action* program will be eligible to apply for an internship in subsequent cohorts of the program. These internships shall be compensated with a stipend. Internship opportunities may include:
 - **Co-facilitator:** Assists with the preparation and facilitation of program modules.
 - **Social Media Manager:** Takes primary responsibility for a social media site related to the project (i.e., Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter.)
 - **Program Ambassador:** Assists with representing the *Young Women Choosing Action* program at meetings, public events, etc.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, which is a collaboration of 20 federal government agencies and organizations working to support youth, defines PYD as follows:

An intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.

Youth.Gov provides the following equation to define PYD:

Positive Experiences + Positive Relationships + Positive Environments = Positive Youth Development

PYD is often framed in terms of the "Five C's" and focuses on specifically developing these emotional, behavioral, and social characteristics: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion. According to developmental scientists, young people who develop each of these Five C's are considered to be thriving, and those who thrive in this way develop a sixth "C": contribution to self, family, community, and civil society.⁴

⁴Zarrett & Lerner, 2008.

“C”	Associated Characteristics
Competence	Social competence refers to interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution). Cognitive competence refers to cognitive abilities (e.g., decision making). Academic competence refers to school performance as shown, in part, by school grades, attendance, and test scores. Health competence involves using nutrition, exercise, and rest to keep oneself fit. Vocational competence involves work habits and explorations of career choices.
Confidence	An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy.
Connection	Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in exchanges between the individual and her peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.
Character	Respect for societal and cultural norms, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
Caring/Compassion	A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

Positive Youth Development programs seek to:⁵

- **Foster** resilience, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, and belief in the future and prosocial norms.
- **Promote** social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral competence; recognition for positive behavior; and opportunities for prosocial involvement.

A range of research and available evidence indicates that access to PYD programs can lead to positive social and emotional outcomes, as well as prevent a variety of risk behaviors. Research has shown the following results:

- PYD programs produce growth and connectedness among youth as well as mitigating depression, anxiety, and various sexual risk behaviors.⁶
- Sustained participation in PYD programs leads to significant improvement in social and emotional skills, attitudes, and academic performance and reductions in internalizing symptoms and risky behaviors.⁷
- PYD programs create empowering environments for youth, teach them real life skills, and provide youth an opportunity to learn and grow in a positive, supportive, and healthy environment.⁸

- According to a comprehensive research study conducted by Tufts University and 4-H, studies suggest a link between PYD and the developmental assets associated with youth programs that incorporate the “Big Three” features of effective youth-serving programs:⁹
 - Positive and sustained relationships between youth and adults.
 - Activities that build important life skills.
 - Opportunities for youth to use these life skills as both participants in and as leaders of valued community activities.

Young Women Choosing Action is designed to foster most of the PYD practices described above. Each module provides activities that build important life skills and opportunities to use these skills in a leadership context. By intentionally cultivating community-building activities and behaviors, *Young Women Choosing Action* offers opportunities to build positive, sustainable relationships between youth and adults.

⁵ Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002.

⁶ Gavin, Catalano, & Markham, 2010; Philliber, Kaye, Herrling, & West, 2002.

⁷ Durlak, et al., 2011.

⁸ Gavin, Catalano, & Markham, 2010.

⁹ Blum, 2003; Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003.

Strategies for Incorporating PYD in Program Delivery:

- Always warmly greet participants upon arrival and make them feel welcome.
- Plan to have a sufficient number of adults available to supervise activities and maintain a safe environment.
- Involve young women in developing a social contract and/or list of expectations and maintain these expectations throughout the program.
- Adapt programming to meet the cultural, age, or developmental needs of participants.
- Be supportive of young women from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.
- Implement the curriculum as intended.

- Provide opportunities for positive social interaction.
- Proactively address conflict as it arises.
- Recognize and build on each participant’s strengths.
- Model and assist young women in learning proactive communication skills.
- Maintain healthy boundaries.
- Interact with all participants in a supportive, affirming, caring manner.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Positive Youth Development Resource Manual — <http://www.actforyouth.net/publications/manual.cfm>
- Positive Youth Development video — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7gr0eCl9FQ&t=13s>

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Trauma is the result of encountering a single experience or enduring repeated events that overwhelm one’s ability to cope or integrate the emotions and ideas that the experience involves. Traumatic events are unexpected and beyond one’s control. Even if there are no physical signs or damage from the trauma, there may be a profound and lasting emotional impact. The impact of trauma on a person

is determined by that person’s individual experience of the event and the meaning they make of it.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms cause distress or functional impairment; are not due to medication, substance use, or other illness; last more than a month; and meet one or more of the following criteria:

WHAT	HOW
Exposure to death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Direct exposure ● Witnessing the trauma ● Learning that a relative or close friend was exposed to trauma ● Indirect exposure to details of the trauma, usually in the course of professional duties (e.g., first responders or medics)
Traumatic event persistently re-experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unwanted upsetting memories ● Nightmares ● Flashbacks ● Emotional distress after exposure to traumatic reminders ● Physical reactivity after exposure to traumatic reminders

WHAT	HOW
Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli after the trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trauma-related thoughts or feelings ● Trauma-related reminders
Negative thoughts or feelings that began or worsened after the trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inability to recall key features of the trauma ● Overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world ● Exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma ● Negative affect ● Decreased interest in activities ● Feeling Isolated ● Difficulty experience positive affect
Trauma-related arousal and reactivity that began or worsened after the trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Irritability or aggression ● Risky or destructive behavior ● Hypervigilance ● Heightened startle reaction ● Difficulty concentrating ● Difficulty sleeping

Throughout the years, clinicians and researchers have found that there are two different types of Post-traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD). The National Center for PTSD identifies Complex PTSD as the second form, as defined by the following:

Defining Complex PTSD	Examples of Long-Term Traumas	Additional Symptoms Seen in Complex PTSD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Result of chronic trauma that continues or repeats for months or years at a time ● Victim generally held in a state of physical or emotional captivity ● Victim under the control of the perpetrator and unable to get away from the danger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Long-term domestic violence ● Long-term child physical abuse ● Long-term child sexual abuse ● Organized child exploitation rings ● Prostitution brothels ● Concentration/prison of war camps 	<p>Emotional Regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Persistent sadness ● Suicidal thoughts ● Explosive anger ● Inhibited anger <p>Consciousness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forgetting traumatic events ● Reliving traumatic events ● Dissociation <p>Self-Perception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helplessness ● Shame/guilt/stigma ● Sense of being different from others <p>Distorted Perceptions of Perpetrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attributing total power to the perpetrator ● Preoccupied with revenge <p>Relations with Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Isolation ● Distrust ● Repeated search for rescuer <p>Systems of Meaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loss of sustaining faith ● Sense of hopelessness or despair

Finally, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that an individual experiences as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening, and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

This project uses a trauma-informed approach that requires an understanding of the nature of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

SAMHSA defines Adverse Childhood Experiences as stressful or traumatic events occurring before the age of 18, including abuse and neglect. They may also include household dysfunction, such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with family members who have substance use disorders.

Trauma-informed approaches differ from trauma-specific practices, which are clinical and therapeutic interventions that directly address trauma-related symptoms. Trauma-

informed programs are not designed to offer therapy or direct counseling. *Young Women Choosing Action* is primarily a leadership program. The mindfulness strategies and brain science lessons are designed to support young women who may be dealing with any range of developmental or trauma-related stress, but they are not intended as a substitute for any clinical services which may be necessary.

SAMHSA describes a trauma-informed program as including the four R's, as it:

- **REALIZES** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery.
- **RECOGNIZES** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system.
- **RESPONDS** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.
- **RESIST** re-traumatization.

FOUR R'S OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE ¹⁰

Realize	Have a basic realization about trauma and understand how trauma can affect families, groups, organizations, and communities as well as individuals.
Recognize	Recognize the signs of trauma. These signs may be gender, age, or setting-specific
Respond	Respond by applying the principles of a trauma-informed approach to all areas of functioning.
Resist Re-traumatization	Avoid inadvertently creating stressful or toxic environments (re-traumatization) that interfere with recovery or well-being.

¹⁰ Adapted from SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, 2014.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH ¹¹

Safety	Provide a safe physical environment and promote a sense of safety in interpersonal interactions. Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority.
Trustworthiness and Transparency	Decisions and information are delivered with transparency, with the goal of building and maintaining trust among participants.
Peer Support	Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing.
Collaboration and Mutuality	Importance is placed on partnering and the leveling of power differences between facilitators and participants, demonstrating that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.
Empowerment, Voice, and Choice	Clients are supported in shared decision-making, choice, and goal setting to determine the plan of action they need to heal and move forward. They are supported in cultivating self-advocacy skills. Staff are facilitators of recovery rather than controllers of recovery.
Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues	The program actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, gender identity, geography, etc.); offers access to gender responsive services; leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections; incorporates policies, protocols, and processes that are responsive to the racial, ethnic and cultural needs of individuals served; and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.

According to the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, sixty percent of adults report experiencing abuse or other difficult circumstances during childhood. The implications of trauma are vast. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente conducted an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study which surveyed over 17,000 people. The ACE study linked early experiences with trauma to increased health risk later in life.¹² The study identified the following adverse childhood experiences as contributing to the heightened risk factors.¹³

- Emotional Abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Substance-using household member
- Divorced/separated parents
- Household member with mental health issues
- Witnessed domestic violence
- Incarcerated family member

The study also suggested that the higher the ACE score, the higher the likelihood of negative health effects.¹⁴ Repeated exposure to trauma increases the risk of health issues, which include the following:

- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Depression
- Suicidality
- Alcoholism
- Substance abuse
- Asthma
- Allergies
- Eczema
- Severe acne

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Felitti et al., 1998.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Dong et al., 2004; Felitti et al., 1998.

There is also evidence that cumulative trauma may negatively impact neurodevelopment, leading to social, emotional, and cognitive impairment, and the adoption of health risk behaviors that ultimately result in disease and early death.¹⁵ Clinical research has highlighted the impact of complex traumas on adolescent development and brain functioning. Emotional and social implications of exposure to trauma among young people may include:¹⁶

- Disturbances in their sense of self.
- A sense of separateness.
- A loss of autobiographical memories and disturbances in body image.
- Poorly modulated affect and impulse control (including aggression against self and others).
- Insecurity in relationships such as distrust, suspiciousness, a lack of intimacy, and isolation.

Trauma impacts cognitive functioning resulting in (Epstein & González, 2017):

- Difficulty concentrating and learning.
- Increased risk for long-term physical illness.
- Impaired immune system.
- Disrupted emotional and behavioral regulation systems.
- Decreased self-awareness.
- Diminished capacity for self-care.
- Impaired ability to connect with others.

More research is starting to examine the intersections of racism and sexism and ACE scores.¹⁷ Girls of color experience various forms of trauma indicated in the ACE study as well as race- and gender-based discrimination, such as sexual assault and being called racial slurs.¹⁸

Young Women Choosing Action provides participants with an understanding of how trauma and adversity might impact wellness and offers skills and vocabulary to help alleviate that impact. Research suggests that healing childhood trauma is not only possible but is of critical importance. Various aspects of the ACE study and other research informs how *Young Women Choosing Action* addresses the impact that trauma and adversity may have on young women of all backgrounds. The ACE study revealed that a score of four or more dramatically increases someone's chances for various health risks later in life. Most versions of the ACE survey neglect to account for gender, economic, and race-based trauma, so taking these factors into account may result in even higher ACE scores among low-income and young women of color.

Young Women Choosing Action integrates developmentally appropriate cognitive and somatic activities to assist young women in addressing the impact of trauma and chronic adversity in their lives. Additionally, the program empowers young women to practice healthy coping strategies, set goals, and carry out impactful leadership project.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime by Nadine Burk Harris — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovIJ3dsNk>
- What is Somatic Experiencing in Trauma Therapy? — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDYRkLAAH2U>
- Introduction to Recovery — <http://trauma-recovery.ca>
- The 4 Essentials of Being a Trauma-Informed Youth Professional — <https://centerforadolescentstudies.com/4-essentials-trauma-informed-youth-professional>

¹⁵ Felitti et al., 1998.

¹⁶ Van der Kolk & Fisler, 1994.

¹⁷ Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Holmes, Facemire, & DaFonseca, 2016.

¹⁸ Onyeka-Crawford, Patrick, & Chaudhry, 2017.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Adolescence describes the transition between childhood and adulthood. Typically recognized as occurring between the ages of 13 and 19, the developmental changes associated with adolescence may start as early as age 10. Neuroscience shows that the brain changes associated with adolescence may not be complete until age 24. In any case, it is a period of vast physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. There are many extensive resources available for further exploration of the teenage development, including those listed below. For the purposes of facilitating *Young Women Choosing Action*, it is important to know the following:¹⁹

- The developmental purpose of adolescence is to move young people toward functional independence and a self-defined identity which are necessary for a productive adulthood.
- Adolescents' brains work differently than adults when they make decisions or solve problems. Their actions are guided more by the emotional and reactive amygdala and less by the thoughtful, logical frontal cortex. Research has also shown that exposure to drugs and alcohol during the teen years can change or delay these developments.
- Based on the stage of their brain development, adolescents are more likely to:
 - Act on impulse.
 - Misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions.
 - Get into accidents of all kinds.
 - Become involved in fights.
 - Engage in dangerous or risky behavior.
- Adolescents are less likely to:
 - Think before they act.

- Pause to consider the consequences of their actions.
- Change their dangerous or inappropriate behaviors.

These brain differences do not mean that young people cannot make good decisions or tell the difference between right and wrong. It also does not mean that they should not be held responsible for their actions. However, an awareness of these differences can help facilitators better understand, anticipate, and manage adolescent behavior.

Because the participants in *Young Women Choosing Action* are adolescents, it is helpful to have a general understanding of their developmental needs. It is worth noting that the extent to which an adolescent's basic needs were met and nurtured in infancy and childhood plays a role in how she moves through the psychosocial stages associated with adolescent development. When children are reared in a supportive, nurturing environment with consistent warm and appropriate discipline, they are likely to develop a secure attachment style. When the environment is filled with inconsistent parenting, violence, neglect, and abuse, insecure attachments may develop. The types of attachments we form in childhood often affect how we relate to ourselves and others later in life. See [Additional Resources](#).

On the heels of early development milestones and experience, the adolescent finds herself moving through the eight stages of psychosocial development. More can be read about the eight stages (which encompass one's entire life) under [Additional Resources](#). Every individual moves through these stages of psychosocial development, and adolescents may be grappling with issues of identity vs. role confusion and/or industry vs. inferiority. Adolescents have a lot on their emotional, intellectual, and biological plates. Fortunately, there are strategies adults can use to support healthy adolescent development.

¹⁹ Adapted from American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology, 2015.

STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PROGRAMMING

- Teach to a variety of learning styles by including visuals and movement whenever possible.
- Break tasks into small chunks.
- Discuss brain development with participants.
- Provide opportunities for decision-making and practicing executive functioning skills.
- Create opportunities for positive social interactions and group engagement with material.
- Ask open-ended questions, rather than yes or no questions, to offer expanded opportunities for reasoning and engagement.
- Offer choice whenever possible.
- Encourage participants to make decisions while calm.
- Incorporate PYD, trauma-informed practice, and mindfulness strategies.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

General

- General Information about adolescent development — <http://www.actforyouth.net/adolescence/>

Healthy Children & Teens

- Stages of Adolescence — <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Stages-of-Adolescence.aspx>
- Marcia's States of Adolescent Identity Development — https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8HIY_bqrVo

Information about Attachment Styles

- Attachment Theory: Main Characteristics of Attachment — <https://www.ronitbaras.com/family-matters/parenting-family/attachment-theory-main-characteristics/>
- Secure and Insecure Attachment in Teenagers — <https://www.ronitbaras.com/family-matters/parenting-family/secure-and-insecure-attachment-in-teenagers/>
- Attachment Theory: Four Attachment Styles — <https://www.ronitbaras.com/family-matters/parenting-family/attachment-theory-four-attachment-styles/>

Identity Development: Eight Stages of Development

- Eight Stages of Development by Erik Erikson — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYCBdZLCDBQ>

MINDFULNESS

According to the consensus of mindfulness researchers, mindfulness is defined as the self-regulation of attention with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance. Self-regulation is the ability to mitigate emotions and to act in one's best interest. Research consistently shows that self-regulation is a skill necessary to emotional well-being.²⁰

Mindfulness may be practiced in a variety of situations using strategies ranging from self-affirming thought to silent meditation. The strategies presented in *Young Women Choosing Action* are tailored to be developmentally and situationally appropriate for adolescents.

In recent years there has been an uptick of studies aimed at evaluating the benefits of practicing mindfulness. The results are promising. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce anxiety and implicit age and race bias, as well as increase body satisfaction.²¹ According to research cited by the Positive Psychology Program, mindfulness has also been shown to:

- Improve empathy, confidence, self-esteem, coping and social skills, and focus and concentration.²²
- Boost resilience in children and help them understand and regulate their own emotions.²³
- Reduce problem behaviors, attention issues, and anxiety, while improving children's social-emotional resiliency.²⁴
- Alleviate stress through improving emotion regulation, leading to a better mood and better ability to handle stress.²⁵
- Decrease aggression and conduct problems and increase focus on academics among young people diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).²⁶
- Improve well-being, especially among homeless middle school students who participated in a mindfulness course.²⁷
- Lead to lower depression and anxiety among teenagers studying for a general education certificate

who participated in a mindfulness program, which contributed to improved academic attainment.²⁸

Other widely reported benefits of mindfulness include:

- Lowered blood pressure
- Lowered heart rate
- Lowered anxiety levels
- Increased immune function
- Higher brain functioning
- Increased awareness
- Increased attention and focus
- Increased clarity in thinking and perception
- Experience of being calm and internally still
- Experience of feeling connected

Mindfulness exercises presented in *Young Women Choosing Action* complement lessons on brain development.

Mindfulness exercises include setting intentions, guided meditations, and yoga practice. The yoga poses presented in this curriculum are introductory somatic exercises, aimed at gently developing the mind-body connection. By offering participants information, online resources, and supporting mindfulness programs between sessions, young women will be able to find an individual practice that feels right for them. Mindfulness and brain science lessons may be drawn upon to support participants' social action leadership work and personal empowerment. Ultimately, young women who complete the program will be empowered to effectively employ choice and leadership strategies in a wide variety of life situations.

²⁰ Stosny, 2011.

²¹ Cho, 2016.

²² Coholic & Eys, 2016.

²³ Coholic, 2011; Coholic, Eys, & Lougheed, 2012.

²⁴ Semple, Lee, Rosa, & Miller, 2010.

²⁵ Remmers, Topolinski, & Koole, 2016.

²⁶ Singh, Soamya, & Ramnath, 2016.

²⁷ Felitti et al., 1998.

²⁸ Ibid.

STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

- Employ the strategies described in the Yoga and Mindfulness Practices portion of the curriculum.
- Always offer alternative methods to mindfulness practices.
- Always be aware of the possibility of mindfulness practices triggering memories or strong responses. Have a response plan in place.
- Present information and instructions in a stress-free, inviting manner.
- Model and acknowledge when you use mindfulness strategies and practices.
- Offer opportunities to reflect on mindfulness activities.
- Strategize how mindfulness may be practiced in an array of situations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Why Aren't We Teaching You Mindfulness? By AnneMarie Rossi — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJPcdiLEkl&t=98s>
- The Free Mindfulness Project — <http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>
- Pocket Mindfulness — <https://www.pocketmindfulness.com/>
- Evidence for the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People — <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MiSP-Research-Summary-2012.pdf>

INTERSECTIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Intersectionality is defined as the interconnected nature of social categorizations, such as race, class, and gender, as they apply to a given individual or group. People with intersectional identities may experience overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. For instance, economically disadvantaged women of color may experience overlapping discrimination based on gender and/or race and/or economic status. Intersectional social justice strategies work to counteract layered discrimination and disadvantage and to bring about equity and positive social change.

According to the organization New Tactics in Human Rights, intersectionality is both a lens for seeing the world of oppression and a tool for eradicating it. The social action leadership program at the heart of the *Young Women*

Choosing Action curriculum offers young women the opportunity to address intersectional discrimination, bias, or injustice which has an impact on their community or their lives. The content of the project is provided by the participants themselves with the facilitators providing a structure and a process that allows them to carry it out with as much depth and creativity as possible.

Little research has been published on the outcomes of intersectional social justice efforts, which reinforces the need for more work in this area. Evidence of intersectional injustice show that young women and girls of color:

- Are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system.²⁹

²⁹ Epstein & González, 2017; Sherman & Balck, 2015.

- Experience sexual abuse at increased rates, which leads to interactions with the police.³⁰
- Receive harsher punishment in schools and are more likely to be pushed out of schools.³¹
- Are more likely to be removed from their families and placed within the foster care system.³²

These and other occurrences may place young women and girls of color at risk or critically at risk. Please refer to the additional resources listed below to learn more about the intersectionality of injustice.

Research shows that young women are drawn to leadership activities and could benefit from participation in leadership programs. According to data from the Girl Scout Research Institute,³³ girls of color (African American, Latinx, and Asian

American) express more desire to be leaders and more confidence in themselves as leaders than boys of their same racial/ethnic group and White [sic] girls. Additionally, White girls express more desire to be leaders and an equal amount of confidence in themselves as leaders as White boys.

Young Women Choosing Action is designed to provide young women opportunities to address a social injustice prevalent in their community through their leadership work on a social action project of their own design. The social action project will be informed by the frame through which participants see and experience injustice in their lives. The nature of intersectionality will be determined by the lived experiences of the participants involved.

STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING INTERSECTIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE STRATEGIES

- Support young women in developing leadership skills as they design an intersectional social action project.
- Acknowledge difference. Don't shy away from discussing how race, economics, gender identity, and other differences inform how one sees and is seen in the world.
- Create a welcoming space. Do the images and posters in the space affirm the identity and experience of the young women participating in the program?
- Avoid assumptions and stereotypes about any aspect of anyone's identity.
- Ask about each participant's preferred personal pronouns.
- Listen to and affirm each participant's experience.
- Model inclusive language.
- Use strategies for incorporating culturally responsive programming.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- What is Intersectionality and What Does it Have to Do with Me? — <http://www.ywboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/>
- Intersectionality: A Definition, History, and Guide — <https://sisteroutrider.wordpress.com/2016/07/27/intersectionality-a-definition-history-and-guide/>

- Intersectionality Framework — <https://patimes.org/intersectionality-framework-understand-injustice/>
- The Urgency of Intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>

³⁰ Saar, 2015.

³¹ Chaudhry & Tucker, 2017; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Patrick & Chaudhry, 2017.

³² Center for The Study of Social Policy, 2015.

³³ 2008, 2011.

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